

not to take away from what Hodges offers us here, however, which is a series of subtly read, scrupulously researched, critically informed readings of precisely these kinds of descriptive tensions. For readers and critics of Chaucer there is much to learn and appreciate here about some of Chaucer's most iconic costume descriptions, including Criseyde's widows weeds, Troilus's various states of undress, Griselda's and Alisoun's smocks, and Sir Thopas's curious armor. Within the chapters several overlapping themes are further emphasized, such as Chaucer's use of *descriptio* (or lack thereof), his use of "signature costumes" to delineate character and facilitate action, the omission of clothing descriptions where one might expect them, and, most amusing perhaps, the amount of attention Chaucer gives to undergarments of both male and female characters. Of the appendices at the end of the book, the one detailing a brief history of street procession and street drapery (related to Hodges's chapter on the "Knight's Tale") is especially substantive.

While for the most part Hodges's central chapters hold together well as complex, multi-layered arguments about compelling literary texts, her introduction and conclusion sometimes feel more like clusters of facts and brief statements about Chaucer's various clothing references and literary techniques. Hodges's offhand description of her potential reader as a "collector of clothing and textile imagery" (172) might in fact best describe her own critical practices of assemblage and accumulation as they are reflected here. There are of course real benefits to this kind of rigorous long-term collecting of research material, and one of those is vigorously apparent throughout *Chaucer and Array*, by which I mean Hodges's knowledge about and citation of numerous and wide-ranging studies related to her topics of choice. For anyone who has been participating in this subfield over the last fifteen years at least, it is especially gratifying to see citations and descriptions of the many fruitful yet unpublished conference papers and discussions—a great number from International Congresses at Kalamazoo—on related topics over this period. In many ways this book reads like a culminating statement about what the field now knows about the garments that Chaucer's characters wear, and also how we got here.

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RICHARD C. HOFFMANN, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*. (Cambridge Medieval Textbooks.) Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Paper. Pp. xvii, 409; 29 black-and-white figures and 14 maps. \$27.99. ISBN: 978-0-521-70037-5. doi:10.1086/688011

For a long time, a scholarly overview of the environmental history of the Middle Ages has been missing, both in English and in other major European languages. But recently, within one year, two books have been published whose concepts, nevertheless, are rather diverse. On the one hand, John Aberth in his book *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: The Crucible of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2013) pursues a more eclectic approach. He focuses on three main subjects: firstly, air, water, and earth (but mostly on climate and weather issues and hardly at all on water systems, hygiene, water as a means of transportation, etc.); secondly, forest (mostly based on case studies from England), and finally, a large chapter on beasts (farming, hunting, pets, animal diseases, animal trials). On the other hand, Richard C. Hoffmann, professor emeritus from York University, Toronto, and one of the leading medievalists and environmental historians in North America, intends a broader overview to illustrate the interactions between human society and the natural environment in medieval Europe.

Hoffmann divides his overview into ten main chapters, which follow either specific periods or themes. In his introduction he presents some theoretical approaches to describe interactions between humans and the environment that are applicable also to the Middle

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Ages, such as the approach by the school of social ecology in Vienna, which highlights socionatural interactions by establishing that “human society, human artefacts, indeed even human bodies, as hybrids of the symbolic and the material, for human organisms and material cultures necessarily exist simultaneously in both the cultural and the natural spheres” (8).

Chapter 1, titled “Long no wilderness,” provides a concise overview of human-nature interrelations before the Middle Ages, starting from the last Ice Age. Hoffmann considers examples of human adaptation to environmental and climate change from the Stone Age to Greek and Roman antiquity. Chapter 2 covers the early Middle Ages (c. AD 400–900), a period with relatively sparse documentary and archaeological evidence. These centuries were dominated by a significant decrease in human population, huge migration in most parts of Europe, and climatic cooling. The end of Roman administration, agriculture, and economy also led to a change in the landscape, in particular to the reforestation of many parts of western and central Europe. Hoffmann also discusses two examples of “anomalous adaptations for anomalous times and ecosystems” (71): the settlement along the Frisian coast and the origins of Venice, situated in a large lagoon. In Carolingian times, an increase in the population and agricultural reforms, both in administration and technique, were responsible for drastic changes in the early medieval landscape.

In chapter 3, Hoffmann interrupts his chronological survey and discusses the relationship of medieval people with the nature surrounding them as God’s creation. There was definitely not one single perception of nature during a thousand years of medieval history, but rather many parallel ones. Nature could be hostile or mild, it could be subjugated by humans but also considered a portent of God’s will. Observing nature should enable humankind to understand it better. Hoffmann also highlights some scholarly debates, such as the arguments in favor of and against Lynn White’s thesis, who argued in the 1960s “that Christianity in general and medieval western Christianity in particular was responsible for the present-day environmental crisis” (88).

The rest of the chapters cover the whole period between AD 900 and 1500 and are dedicated to specific topics: chapter 4 deals with medieval land use and the formation of traditional landscapes, in particular with the great clearances in the high Middle Ages, the intensified cereal landscapes in Mediterranean Europe, the drainage of wetlands, and the environmental consequences of these new anthropogenic ecosystems. Chapters 5 and 6 describe the use, management, and sustainability of local ecosystems during the Middle Ages: the former chapter focuses primarily on biological production sectors, comparing, among others, the traditional agroecosystems in central and northern Europe and the Mediterranean basin. The latter chapter concentrates on interactions with the nonliving environment and deals with the energy basis for medieval society, looking at mining, metallurgy, and other manufacturing, but also at urban ecologies.

Chapter 7 explains why it is important to deal with medieval forms of ownership in a legal and a religious sense to understand interactions between humans and the environment. Chapter 8 is dedicated to diseases as a natural agent. Starting with baseline disease conditions in preindustrial Europe, Hoffmann focuses on the so-called Justinianic plague, leprosy, the Black Death, English sweats, and malaria. He shows that, for instance, leprosy was spread disproportionately among the aristocracy and bourgeoisie because the disease uses cholesterol as a primary growth element, which meant that meat-eating elites were more likely to experience rampant physical leprosy than were undernourished people (287).

Chapter 9, titled “An inconstant planet, seen and unseen, under foot and overhead,” looks at earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, climate, and natural hazards, which were perceived both as incalculable natural violence and as divine signs. Hoffmann also discusses the methods and results of historical climatology, basing his analysis on documentary evidence and natural archives. He gives an overview of the “warm” medieval climate anomaly

and the transition to the so-called Little Ice Age (c. 1300 onwards). He also provides some case studies, looking at how the changing climate influenced the environmental history of Iceland, Scotland, and Scandinavia. In his final chapter, Hoffmann considers the “slow end of medieval environmental relations” and discusses some events that led to the end of the Middle Ages from an environmental history point of view, among them the Columbian encounter from a European perspective.

There is hardly anything to criticize about this book. Some of the maps are clearly too small, in particular 4.2a and 4.2b (131–32). The three black-and-white photographs in figure 9.2 (326) are both too small and of low quality. Figure 4.5 (139) could be improved by zooming in on the Lake of Montady and its close surroundings. Overall, Richard C. Hoffmann has provided a rich overview of medieval daily life and thought with regard to the natural environment. He does not only focus on the interaction between nature and humans, but also contextualizes his findings in a larger framework of economic and social history, and the histories of law and mentalities. The book will serve as a readable introduction for students and scholars of medieval history, as well as enable specialists in environmental history to build on his work. Hoffmann’s *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* will be an essential book and a work to use as a reference for all medievalists and environmental historians.

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MEGAN HOLMES, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. Pp. ix, 381; 170 black-and-white and 80 color figures. \$75. ISBN: 978-0-300-17660-5.

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Florence in the Renaissance vies with the contemporary world as an image-saturated culture, and the art it produced is still viewed as a pinnacle of elite culture. But art historians have tended to look with disdain on the humble cult objects and even on the revered wonderworking images that constituted the bulk of Florentines’ encounters with images in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Megan Holmes’s *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* offers an important corrective to this neglect and also to scholarship in social (art) history that has not taken into account the materiality of the images and their surroundings: as Holmes describes the stakes of her argument, “it is the premise of this book that material and formal properties of miraculous images really did matter” (9).

In *The Miraculous Image*, Holmes provides an extraordinarily comprehensive study of artworks that were the object of miracle-based cults within the context of thirteenth- to sixteenth-century Florence and its surrounding (and largely politically dependent) towns. Holmes puts the focus on the images themselves, mainly images of the Virgin and Child but also a number of crucifixes, especially those associated with the Bianchi movement of 1399. These are works not captured in Michael Baxandall’s famous and utterly disenchanting characterization of artworks as the “deposit [in both the economic and the geological sense] of a social relationship.” If Baxandall’s period eye placed the emphasis on the viewer-cum-client and sought methods for understanding works in elements of this viewer’s education and profession, Holmes shifts the focus from the viewer to the artworks themselves.

She begins with an overview that amasses general data both to clarify and to complicate our picture of miracle-working images, systematically studying both the chronology of new image cults (in chapter 2) and their locations (in chapter 3, examining the topography of the city and environs). She pinpoints historical reasons for specific spikes in production of new image cults (the Bianchi movement, the political turmoil of the late fifteenth

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